PINS, FELT, AND CLOTH: PERFORMING MORMON FEMINISM

by

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ABSTRACT

The sculptural series *Seer Bonnets* (2009-present) by artist Angela Ellsworth addresses issues of gender, polygamy, and the historical recovery of Mormon pioneer artifacts and culture. *Seer Bonnet X*, *XI*, and *XII* in the collection of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts are positioned in this thesis as a case study to examine the visual, material, and referential qualities of the works. The three sunbonnets reference the 10th, 11th, and 12th wives of Joseph Smith: Patty Bartlett Sessions, Marinda Johnson Hyde, and Elizabeth Davis Durfee. Aesthetically and in their titles, the works imitate the design of historic nineteenth-century Mormon women's pioneer sunbonnets—which the sculptures mimic—while also referencing the material artifact the seer stone used exclusively by men in the Mormon faith. However, simultaneously, the bonnets operate distinctively as art objects mounted and displayed inside the museum for the purpose of viewing and admiring. Ellsworth's bonnet series blurs the lines between functionality and decoration, private and public, clothing and art, absence and presence, man and woman, and beauty and danger. The contrasts raise questions about what the bonnets represent as items pieced together from multiple sources and meanings.

In this thesis, I consider the many allusions present in Ellsworth's work. A thorough examination of the recovered past coupled with and analysis of the production of the works inside the artists studio leads to the ultimate consideration of the works as objects that speak to the value and place of women. I argue that this work not only

recovers an ambivalent past, but engages in a contemporary revision of the story that foreground women, even at the expense of further complicating history. Ellsworth obscures several divisions, especially gender, providing the women of her project access to historically male objects and positions. Rather than solely acting as objects of recovery, Ellsworth's sunbonnets use articles of the past as references for sculptures that refashion the representation of Mormon pioneer women in present-day conversations.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, stories about modern-day polygamist families have popped up on popular television networks and in news headlines, inciting a growing interest in the private lives of past and present multipartner households. Although polygamy has been prohibited in the U.S. since 1882, it remains a subject of popular fascination as well as a topic of debate. Ethical, legal, and historical assessments of polygamy consistently center on its implications for women and gender: can polygamy serve an empowering function for women, as a basis for gendered community and social bonds? Or is polygamy decidedly oppressive for women?

Contemporary artist Angela Ellsworth channels historic Latter Day Saints (LDS, commonly referred to as Mormon) polygamist participants and moves the past into a present-day discussion about the institution with a three-dimensional sculptural series entitled, *Seer Bonnets* (2009-present). Ellsworth has consistently focused her practice on women's social issues. The bonnet series continues Ellsworth's work with women, evoking her Mormon heritage, and drawing attention to the role of women in a specific and personally familiar religious community. Each series of sculptures addresses the wives of a prominent leader inside the LDS faith. Ellsworth's first bonnets series is based on the nine wives of her great, great grandfather Lorenzo Snow, and it features nine bonnets. Ellsworth's current project centers on the first Prophet and founder of the LDS

faith, Joseph Smith, who took thirty-five wives throughout his life.[1] Although not yet complete, the current series also examines the wives of a prominent Church Prophet by constructing bonnets as emblems of the women. The University of Utah Museum of Art owns three works in the *Seer Bonnets* series: X, XI, and XII, referencing the 10th, 11th, and 12th wives of Joseph Smith: Patty Bartlett Sessions, Marinda Johnson Hyde, and Elizabeth Davis Durfee, respectively.

Ellsworth participates in a project of historical recovery, transplanting Mormon pioneer persons and artifacts into the present-day. The *Seer Bonnet* series engages with an equivocal history that Ellsworth questions. Throughout this thesis, I argue that the sunbonnets are ambivalent objects that comment on the nature of remembrance as it pertains to Mormonism, polygamy, and women. Through the conception and production of the works Ellsworth composes her own historical account by reclaiming items and individuals from the past in order to more adequately focus on the position of women in Mormon records and the Church. However, even Ellsworth's contemporary storyline is complicated at times, in that the model for the assembled community of women stems from the institution of polygamy, formerly dominated by men. This thesis explores the contradictions of the *Seer Bonnet* series and in doing so considers how the sculptural works evoke past Mormon pioneer culture for the purpose of elevating the position and value of Mormon women through the process of refashioning the male-dominated system of polygamy and building a society of only women.

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[1] Scholars debate the exact number of Joseph Smith's wives. Due to evolving Church beliefs about marriage and the initial secretiveness of the Church about beginning polygamist practices during the 1840s, the number of Smith's wives can only be insinuated. For the purpose of the *Seer Bonnet* project, Ellsworth chooses to document thirty-five women in Joseph Smith's life.

Focusing in particular on the bonnets in the UMFA's collection, in the remainder of this thesis, I trace the dynamics of recovery and revision through significant junctures in the works' own history—the Mormon past, the artist's studio, and the museum. My analysis begins with an exploration of *Seer Bonnet X*, *XI*, and *XII* giving specific attention to design and materials choices in order to assess the implications of the sunbonnet and seer stone as referential items reworked as sculptures. I argue that generating a strong historical link to Mormon culture through the use of material objects revives the past and sets the foundation for Ellsworth's dialogue about women inside Mormon culture. The second section centers on the equivocal institution of polygamy, examining the nascent stages of the Mormon Church and plural marriage within the Church. Recovering the plural wives of prominent Mormon prophets provides the base for a discussion about the visibility and omission of pioneer women and the legacy of polygamy. Ellsworth uses the dynamics of wives in historical polygamist families as a model for her own contemporary community filled solely with women. The third section of this thesis focuses on the artist's manufactured women-only workspace that recalls 1970s feminist art techniques during conception and production of the bonnets. The controlled "homosocial" environment of the studio—completely void of the male body— highlights the sunbonnet project as one of recovery, in which Ellsworth uses the retrieved items and people of the past as the foundation for a new narrative completely fixated on women. The final section of this thesis considers the shifting significance of the *Seer Bonnets* between the studio and museum. Once outside of the ordered productions space, the sunbonnets change and evolve. I argue that the material qualities and a strong visual link to recognizable objects play a major role in the reception of the works.

METAL AND FABRIC

Seer Bonnets is a series of three-dimensional sculptural objects that aesthetically imitate the design of historic nineteenth-century Mormon pioneer sunbonnets, hand-fashioned, made of pearl-tipped corsage pins, fabric, and steel. The visual qualities of the sunbonnets recall Mormon pioneer artifacts; however, the material properties of the sculptures distinctively detach the series from the past and place them in a present-day conversation. Ellsworth standardizes the material used for construction of the bonnets in order to create cohesion from one work to the next, yet subtle variation between the works give each object an individual identity. The design choices underline the artist's resolve to create an interrelated series, in which each work slightly diverges from the one before, yet also maintain the model and allusions of the overall project.

Each bonnet is identifiable by a Roman numeral title followed by a woman's name in parentheses. The Roman numeral associated with each bonnet situates the object within a timeline, indicating the chronological ordering of the multiple marriages of significant male LDS prophets. The names and identities of the women are textually relegated to a parenthetical position behind the sequential set of numbers, overshadowing the names of the female pioneers, and reducing them to a sequential ordering system.

Seer Bonnet X (Patty), created in 2010, measures 46 5/8 x 12 7/8 x 15 3/4 inches, replaces fabric with white, cream, and grey corsage pins. *Seer Bonnet XI (Miranda)*, created in 2010, measures 53 1/2 x 11 1/4 x 16 1/2 inches, almost seven inches taller than

it predecessor and has a slightly more slender width, yet a longer length. Similar to the color scheme of *Seer Bonnet X (Patty)*, *Seer Bonnet XI (Miranda)* utilizes grey, cream, and white pearl-tipped corsage pins of varying sizes. The last bonnet in the series of three located at the UMFA, *Seer Bonnet XII (Elizabeth)*, created in 2010, measures 50 1/4 x 11 1/2 x 14 3/4 inches. Even though numerically last amongst the three, in terms of size, *Seer Bonnet XII* fits in the middle of the two prior sculptures. *Seer Bonnet XII (Elizabeth)* differs in color scheme compared to the other two bonnets in the collection. Ellsworth forgoes the cream pearl pins of the previous two bonnets and instead employs a design pattern dominated by white pearl-tipped corsage pins, with a limited use of grey corsage pins.

By combining between 19,000-22,000 metal tipped corsage pins, Ellsworth creates a likeness to a familiar past historical object by mimicking the basic components of a sunbonnet—the brim, the crown, the tail, and the adjustable strings. Historically pioneer women made bonnets out of cheap, reusable, and easily cleaned materials such as cotton, gingham, and calico. Women used materials in shades of brown and grey for bonnets imitating the natural elements that dirtied and wore the fabrics. The design of the sunbonnet featured a semicircular cape or crown that rested on the back of the wearers' head and attached to a brim.[2] Long bands of fabric emerged from the base of the sunbonnet that could easily be adjusted and tied to hold the sunbonnet in place during the pioneer trek to the Salt Lake Valley. Sunbonnets functioned as protective aids that shielded the head and the face from sun, wind, and other harsh elements encountered

[2] Small slits cut in the material of the brim allowed pioneer women to insert pasteboard or some other type of stiff material into the underpinnings of the sunbonnet in order to create a rigid structural rim to protect the face of the wearer against the elements.

along the trek through the plains to Salt Lake Valley. Typically, sunbonnets were light in weight and easily adjustable with strings and buttons added in order to regulate the exact size of the garment. Women designed the headwear to safeguard against sunburns, overexposure, heat stroke, and freckles. Adjustments to the brim, strings, and backside of the bonnet allowed for added protection for the face and the neck.[3]

While in material opposition —metal and felt versus the reusable fabric of the old— *Seer Bonnets X*, *XI*, and *XII* duplicate the features of the sunbonnet, the brim, the crown, the tails, and the adjustable strings. In *Seer Bonnet X (Patty)* the brim attaches to the crown of the bonnet composed of different sized grey and cream pearl-tipped corsage pins.[4] A ruffled piece of felt pierced with white pearl-tipped pins demarcates the separation of the brim from the crown. The tails or ties of the bonnet hang down the back under the crown and extend to both sides of the object. Two of the four ties emerge like tentacles from the sides of the object, at the junction of the tail and the brim. These ties are wider and do not lay flat against the exterior structure of the bonnet. Rather, the tentacles curve, suggesting movement or weight as a result of the length and mass of the pins. This second set of ties materializes from the underneath carriage of the bonnet, one on either side, where the nexus of protruding piercing pins invades the spatial cavity. As these slightly narrower ties fall to the ground, they coil and twist.

In *Seer Bonnet XI (Miranda)*, the ruffled fabric separating the brim of the bonnet from the crown has been inverted and the pins face outwards towards the viewer when approached from the front. The tails of the bonnet exhibit a decorative pattern of three

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[3] Fairfax Proudfit Walkup, "The Sunbonnet Women: Fashion in Utah Pioneer Costume," *Utah Humanities Review I* (July 1947): 201-222.

[4] This piece of the bonnet varied in size depending on the length and thickness of the woman's hair.

successive teardrop shapes that converge in a pointed fin outline on the brim of the object. Although similar, the tails lack exact symmetry; the design is marginally altered from the design of Seer *Bonnet X (Patty)*. However, similar to *Seer Bonnet X (Patty)*, this bonnet features four tentacles: two emerge from the juncture between the brim and the tails, and two spring from the interior network of sharp-edged needles. When displayed, the two smaller and narrower interior bands are tied, alluding to the original function of the tentacles for adjusting size and guaranteeing fit.

Lastly, the brim of *Seer Bonnet XII (Elizabeth)* transitions into the crown of the bonnet through a piece of felt with white pearl-tipped pins pushed into the fabric. Similar to *Seer Bonnet X (Patty)*, the pins project into the space of the crown, obscuring the uppermost section of the pinwork with a weave of prickly needles on the backside of the object. The tails of the bonnet are decorated with vertical linear patterns that alternate between white and grey. *Seer Bonnet XII (Elizabeth)* has four tentacles, but in comparison to the other bonnets in the UMFA's collection, this bonnet features patches of different color pins.

Ellsworth deliberately duplicates every component of traditional Mormon pioneer sunbonnets because sustaining a strong link to the artifact stands critical to the project. The sculptural pieces stand far removed from the original parts of the sunbonnet; the crown does not cover hair, the brim does not protect against sun, and the tails do not help adjust the garment. However, the reproduction of the sunbonnet induces a personal connection since clothing has the potential to insinuate a correlation to a personal

identity, a type of presence conjured when the item envelops the individual.[5] Direct contact with a person's actual skin provides clothing the potential to take on significance that becomes instilled in the personal and social practices of the wearer.[6] Through the process of placing clothes on the body, one literally wraps themself in their identity, presenting personality and internal intentions through an outwardly visible surface of the cloth. Arthur Danto studies what he calls the "richly symbolic" attributes of clothing, which are woven into the fabrics. Clothing communicates an array of information that others translate and interpret into characteristics and personality traits of the wearer.[7] In the series, *Seer Bonnets*, Ellsworth takes advantage of the powerful meaning attached to clothing by constructing objects that mimic an article of clothing—used and constructed by pioneer Mormon women—in an attempt to present an implied link to a specific individual.[8] Even though Ellsworth's bonnets only possess the superficial potential to cover the body as a result of the material properties of pins, the sculptural bonnets still manage to insinuate a relationship to a specified owner. The weaving of autobiographical information into the materials and the distinctive interest in individualizing the works indicates a supposed identity for each bonnet.

In the process of refashioning traditional pioneer sunbonnets out of pins, Ellsworth incorporates another object of Mormon material culture into the sculptural series, the seer stone. Seer stones were traditionally linked to the "seer" tradition of

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[5] Sophia Woodward, "Aesthetics of Clothing," in *Clothing as Material Culture*, edited by Susanne Küchler and Daniel Miller (New York: Berg, 2005), 22.
[6] Woodward, 21-38.
[7] Arthur Danto, "Reflections on Fabric and Meaning: The Tapestry and the Loincloth," in *New Material as New Media: The Fabric Workshop and Museum*, edited by Marion Boulton Stroud (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 82-89.
[8] Ibid.

foresight and vision. The Oxford Dictionary defines a seer as "a person who is supposed to be able, through supernatural insight, to see what the future holds; an expert who provides forecasts of the economic or political future."[9] Seer stones varied in size, coloration, and overall appearance. Many accounts of stones relate the size of the rocks to body parts, compare the rocks to precious metals, and give discernible attributes of the stones, such as number or placement of holes and the texture of the stones.[10] LDS men used the stones as "seeing" tools to receive divine prophecies and locate lost and hidden objects and treasure.

Historically, the first prophet of the LDS Church used several seer stones for treasure hunting and seer-ship, which was considered a great gift.[11] These stones in the possession of Smith delivered financial gain for the prophet and his family, while additionally aiding the first prophet in the founding of the LDS faith and the translation of the Book of Mormon.[12] In contrast to nineteenth-century American historical tradition linking seer stones to both men and women, in the LDS faith, men exclusively owned and used seer rock for religious revelations.[13] Ellsworth amends this distinction between men

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[9] Oxford Dictionary
[10] Michael D. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987).
[11] Abel D. Chase. Affidavit, 2 May 1879. wyl 1886 statement, 1881. Notebook #5, Box 43, William H. Kelley Papers and Ezra Pierce, Interview 1881. Saints' Herald (1 June 1881), 163.
[12] Several accounts acknowledge the use of seer stones in the translation of the Book of Mormon. Martin Harrison one of the men who helped Joseph Smith Jr. translate the books explained the process " Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and pit his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English." David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, Missouri: David Whitmer, 1887) reprinted in 1938, 12.
[13] Michael D. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*.

and women by recovering and transforming a female gendered article of clothing—the sunbonnet—into an object of sight simulating attributes attached to seer rocks. However, even though Ellsworth modifies the form and users of the seer stone, one must note that historically in Mormon culture, those objects were solely meant for men. Ellsworth reworks the historical recovery in order to give women access to a role previously denied to them in their religion.

The term "seer" acts in the title of the sculptural series as a reference to the revelatory matter that materializes in the works as arabesque circular design patterns on the exterior of the bonnets. Ellsworth explains the exterior decorations stating, "The circles [are] my idea of giving the women wearing the bonnets their own visions and the possibility of seeing and translating things."[14] Each bonnet in the UMFA collection has its own ocular "seer" patterning on the exterior of the surface of the sculpture. However, the "seeing" objects no longer resemble the artifacts of the past, but are instead composed of corsage pins clustered collectively in circular designs.

In *Seer Bonnet X (Patty)*, delicate variations in pin size and color establish a subtle distinction between the cream background and the organic circular embellishments, which are delineated by a single row of grey pearl-tipped pins. The spherical patterning appears on both sides of the bonnet, generating a balanced design on the exterior of the sculpture. Each bunch of pins on either side of the bonnet changes the surface texture of the work, while additionally modifying the appearance of light as it hits the sculpture. For *Seer Bonnet XI (Miranda)*, Ellsworth constructs a circular shape against a white background that faintly differs from *Seer Bonnet X (Patty)*. On either side

[14]Kathleen Vanesian, "Angela Ellsworth on Being Gay in the Mormon Church, and her Increasing Success," *Phoenix New Time*, October 7, 2010.

of the bonnet's brim, three elevated rows of cream pearl-tipped pins encompass a smaller circle of white pearl-tipped corsage pins. In *Seer Bonnet XII (Elizabeth)*, the seer stone takes shape as a circular arrangement composed of small grey pins and large and small pearl-tipped white pins. The spherical shape in the center of the brim is separated from the white background of the bonnet by three rows of small grey pearl-tipped pins. Once again, a series of different colored circular rows creates concentric circles around a raised center of bundled pins.

The lustrous beauty of the exterior stands in stark contrast to the threatening interior of the sculpture, which appears as thousands of sharp-edged overlapping pins extend into the spatial cavity, originally intended for the wearers' head. The overcrowded pins that define the interior cavity of the bonnet sculptures counter the conventional function of a bonnet as an article of clothing worn on the head. In Ellsworth's sculpture, the utility of the artifact disappears, and the practical, reusable fabric transform into metal, felt, and beautifully lustrous pearl-tipped pin.

The *Seer Bonnet* series alters the physical qualities of the historical items—the sunbonnet and the seer stone—conjoining and converting the objects of Mormon pioneer material culture into metal, felt, and pearl-tipped pins. In the work, the materials combine to create variations on the surface of the bonnets and texturally alter the exterior appearance of the works. The tactile, flexible, and soft properties of felt contradict the hard, inflexible, and metal pearl-tipped corsage pins that pierce the pliable fiber. Some pins protrude further into the viewers' space, while other pins remain firmly cemented into the nexus of sharp edges. Felt transforms the fixity of the metal pins into pliable, moveable, and constantly fluctuating materials. The metal pins assume some of the

material qualities of the felt, losing aspects of their solid character as they move in and out of the soft and malleable infrastructural base of felt. Piercing the felt repetitively with pins begins inside Ellsworth's studio and continues into the museum space as caretakers and curators resituate the pins.

Seer Bonnet X, XI, and XII visually emulate pioneer bonnets suggesting a common design template amongst the works. However, while Ellsworth follows a template, the artist also slightly varies the visual qualities from one work to the next. Ellsworth produces each bonnet in order to embody the individual identity of a historical pioneer woman, therefore *Seer Bonnet X, XI, and XII* have different patterning on the brims, diverse pin placement, and assorted tentacle lengths. The viewer initially perceives sameness between the bonnets, since pinpointing the individual traits of each sunbonnet requires close examination. However, attentiveness to subtle modifications from one bonnet to the next —changes in pin color, size, and patterning—emphasizes the intention placed on individual character. Throughout the process of conception, production, and display of the *Seer Bonnet* series Ellsworth negotiates the relationship between women as the collective whole—inside Mormonism and polygamy—and the distinctive pioneer women of the past.

"LIVING THE PRINCIPLE"

> Man is endowed with polygamic qualities and women with monogamic ones. This is no question of quality in intelligence or excellence, it turns on uncreated qualities of man's being that enables him to be perfectly on with more than one woman.
>
> Kimall Young, *Isn't One Wife Enough? : The Story of Mormon Polygamy*

Ellsworth's project concentrates on the multiple wives of acclaimed Church Prophets in order to foreground a complicated historical tradition that appears to systematically overlook the contributions of Mormon pioneer women. *Seer Bonnets* meditates on a complex history and provokes a discourse between the modern LDS Church and an ambiguous past.[15] The sunbonnet stands as the ultimate emblem of pioneer women and the reclamation of the artifact allows Ellsworth to focus specifically on women and the work they contributed to pioneer society. Ellsworth revises the artifact in contemporary terms using modern materials and discusses the legacy of polygamy by highlighting issues of visibility and omission.

Joseph Smith—the first prophet of the faith— was born on December 23, 1805, in Sharon, Vermont as the third of nine children to Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith. The

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[15] The current LDS Church leaders and members distance themselves from contemporary polygamy practiced in the Fundamentalist sect of the Church. The former head of the Mormon faith, Gordon B. Hinckley, noted that the Lord revealed an updated doctrine to Brigham Young that called for the end to the practice of polygamy in the Church. Therefore, the current Church sanctions polygamy pointing out the illegal status of the practice and attempts to make strong distinctions between themselves and polygamist churches.

family moved to upstate Palmyra, New York between 1816-17, which during the 1820s and 1830s became a fervent religious area referred to as the "Burned Over District."[16] While living in upstate New York, Smith received his first religious vision of God the Father and Jesus Christ in the woods near his house at the age of fourteen, in which Joseph was told that none of the churches were true.[17] This began the prophet's search for a new religion, and in 1830, after receiving gold plates from the angel Moroni on the Hill Cumorah, Joseph Smith translated the plates with the help of a seer stone and published the teachings as the Book of Mormon.[18] During the beginning stages of the Mormon faith, the religion drew members from mainstream churches in America and proposed the construction of a new purified Church within a utopian society removed from social disorder and corruption. The Church offered each member the opportunity to build "Zion," or heaven on earth, through hard work and faith.[19]

Revelations became essential to the core values and growth of the Church. Throughout the development of the faith, Smith preached that all could have a relationship with God and receive diving inspiration from above. [20] However, as the Church grew, women became increasingly left out of the celestial sphere.[21] Smith received his own prophecies, which marked the pathway of growth in the Mormon Church and distinctively removed the new faith from the diseased old order. As a

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[16] *The Mormons: Part 1*, directed by Helen Whitney (2007; Boston, MA: WGBH Education Foundational, 2007), Video.
[17] Joseph Smith comes from a long tradition of visionaries; his father and grandfather both claimed to receive visions.
[18] *The Mormons: Part 1*, directed by Helen Whitney
[19] Zion refers to heaven on earth.
[20] *The Mormons: Part 1*, directed by Helen Whitney
[21] Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: Three Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

decisive doctoral split from other churches during the time, Smith recounted the divination of "Celestial marriage," which the Lord revealed as an essential principle to reconnect current believers with the figures of the Old Testament. Initially due to the controversial nature of the prophecy and the deeply ingrained principle of monogamy, Smith and some of his closest followers practiced plural marriage secretly. [22]

The Mormon polygamist tradition distinctively separates the history of LDS Church from other American religious sects.[23] Joseph Smith hailed polygamy as a divine proclamation from God, stating that men should live like their ancestor Abraham and take multiple wives in order to restore the patriarchal marriages of the Old Testament.[24] This revelation elevated marriage to a level of extreme importance and the institution became necessary for one to receive the highest status in heaven. Men "sealed" in a celestial marriage—a marriage for time and eternity—would eventually rule over their own realm in the afterlife surrounded by their wives, children, great grandchildren, etc. Smith introduced plural marriage as a superior form of celestial marriage, ensuring the chosen few men a world of their own in the afterlife.[25] These new attitudes about marriage allowed the Church to directly regulate the intimate lives of its members, transforming

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[22] Foster, 146-151

[23] Polygamy was practices by other societies and group prior to the adoption of the marital practice by Joseph Smith and the LDS Church. Old Testament prophets took multiple wives and societies in Africa, the Pacific, and North and South American took multiple spouses. However, the encouragement by higher-ranking Church official to take multiple wives distinctively separates Mormonism from other Christian religions practices in Europe and America in the nineteenth-century. Jessie Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families: Life in the Principle* (Salt Lake City, Utah: University Press, 1987), 3-8.

[24] There is no exact count of the number of wives taken by the prophet Joseph Smith. Additionally, there is no distinction between sexual relationships and those wives taken and "sealed" to Smith for eternity.

[25] Foster, 142-146.

polygamy into a social duty and means to salvation.[26] By instituting plural marriage as a primary principle and encouraging top-level members of the faith to take multiple wives, Church leaders were ensured numerous righteous and faithful families. If the greatest men in the Church procreated often with respectable women, then Mormonism would continue to prosper and generate model members of the faith.[27] However, polygamy took some convincing for many believers, especially amongst followers who joined the Church in the nascent stages of the faith where the principle of plural marriage did not yet exist.

Even though initially unpopular, some women preferred elements of plural marriage. At times, polygamy offered a practical living arrangement for women. Dutiful men of the faith wed widowed wives and provided financial stability and support dealing with frontier life challenges. Additionally, in the instance that plural wives lived together under the same roof, the families split household duties among extra hands.[28] Because plural marriage required the husband to split time among his wives and children, many plural wives saw their husbands sporadically or once a month. This permitted women to live independent lives and flourish without the constant supervision of their husbands.[29] However, polygamy did have disadvantages, and at times strained familial relationship.

From the beginning, early converts to Mormonism struggled to accept plural marriage as a divine proclamation, because of a prior deeply rooted monogamous

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[26] Julie Dunfey, "Living the Principle of Plural Marriage: Mormon Women, Utopia, and Female Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century," *Feminist Studies* 10 (Autumn, 1984): 523-536.
[27] Foster, 201.
[28] Stephanie Smith Goodson, "Plural Wives," in *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah*, edited by Claudia L. Bushman (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Emmeline Press, 1976), 89-111.
[29] Foster, 211-216.

tradition. Polygamist wives only received status through their husbands, but were held as models for others in the community. Some women married into multiple partner homes out of feelings of duty and obligation, and occasionally unhappy wives remained in troubled marriages and family arrangements out of fear being left out of the kingdom of God in the afterlife.[30] Occasionally, jealously among the wives caused problems that hindered collaboration. However, women strove to cultivate successful plural marriages by living "the principle" as devotedly and diligently as possible in order to prove their steadfastness through the trials and tribulations sent by God, even in the wake of marital problems with other wives and spouses.[31]

But even a strong devotion to the principle of plural marriage could not hold off the federal government. The Edmunds Act of 1882 dissolved polygamist marriages and dictated harsh penalties for those still practicing polygamy in United States. This forced many Mormon men to choose one wife and leave the others in order to avoid persecution.[32] However, many accounts note the continuation of polygamist marriages in Canada and Mexico following the official dissolution of polygamy as religious doctrine by Church representatives.[33]

The tension between benefits and consequences inside polygamist marriages have led scholars to debate the effects on Mormon pioneer women. Some scholars equate

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[30] Ibid.
[31] "The Principle," refers to the divine proclamation of polygamy.
[32] Jessie L Embry and Lois Kelley, "Polygamous and Monogamous Mormon Women: A Comparison," in *Women in Utah History*, edited by Patricia Lyn Scott and Linda Thatcher (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2005), 1-35.
[33] Ibid. Embry references several documents and historical journals that talk about marriages taking place underground and across the US border after the federal government attacked Mormonism for its practice of plural marriage. This suggests that even though outlawed polygamy still remained central to certain Church representative as a divine proclamation given to Joseph Smith back in the infancy of the religion.

polygamy to slavery and barbarism, while others suggest that the lives of women who participated in polygamist marriages very closely resembled those who lived in monogamous marriages.[34] Others suggest the cultivation and fostering of a feminist mentality among plural wives in the Mormon pioneer communities because women primarily supported and tended to the family. In the absence of the husband due to Church callings out of state, each wife asserted control by assuming financial responsibilities, managing the household, and becoming autonomous.[35] In many instances, plural wives did not cohabitate together in the same house or even the same city. Therefore, in these instances, each wife independently coped without the support of a spouse, relying solely on themselves for subsistence rather than a community of plural wives. However, even amid the possibility of extreme hardship, many women defended the sanctity of the practice, praising the Church for allowing women to play an important role in settlement on the frontier as well as yielding a society that respected the propriety and eternal afterlife of women.[36]

Ellsworth characterizes Mormon polygamy as a system that intentionally disregards the women that willingly obeyed the Lord's principle of plural marriage. In the "Best of Phoenix 2010" video, Ellsworth states that there are "lists and lists of women who are not named in history" (particular Mormon history), and her goal in constructing the bonnet series is to "get rid of the omission and bring visibility by acknowledging and

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[34] Jessie L. Embry and Lois Kelley note that polygamist marriages tended to closely resembled monogamist relationships, navigating the struggles of a partnership on the frontier.
[35] Patricia Lyn Scott and Linda Thatcher, "Introduction," in *Women in Utah History*, edited by Patricia Lyn Scott and Linda Thatcher (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2005), ix-xviii.
[36] Dunfey, 523-536.

giving some notoriety to the women that were a part of Mormon communities."[37] Material choice brings to the foreground themes of "omission" and "visibility" embedded in Ellsworth's sculptural project. The sharp, metal pins capable of impaling the wearer's head prompts feelings of pain and restriction. Ellsworth transforms a soft and protective item into a literal torture device that discourages use. There is an understanding that the bonnets are indeed sculptural and not wearable. However, the pins protruding into the interior cavity of the bonnet elicit a connection to a past garment of suffering, "the crown of thorns." Ellsworth's headpiece utilizes hard, durable, and industrial materials as opposed to nature's sharp pins, the thorn. While Jesus's crown functions as a garment of ridicule and mockery, the seer bonnets exist as spiritual instruments meant for use by the women who were left out of historical prophecies and the Church hierarchy.[38] The bonnets embody elements of seership and divination —the circular designs on the exterior of the sculpture— only achieved by women through hardship. The materials and inward orientation of the pins imply that women must endure in order to become essential members of the faith and solidify their place on a list of those remembered. One must physically puncture their head with pins in order to receive divine inspiration and visibility.

The theme of omission becomes further apparent in the subjects chosen by the artists. Thus far, the project exclusively investigates individuals that possessed the means and position to amass large numbers of multiple wives. During the frontier days, it was

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[37] Angela Ellsworth, "Hero Worship," YouTube video, 1:59, posted by "BestofPhoenix2010," September 28, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=er6UzXiBiws.

[38] According to John 19: 2-3, "And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him; [3] and they *began* to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him slaps *in the face*."

typical for distinguished and prominent LDS men to receive higher callings to take on multiple wives. The mention of polygamy and Mormonism elicit visions of enormous families, composed of multiple spouses—sometimes numbering as many as thirty—and children sharing the attention and time of one single male partner.[39] In reality, the majority of polygamist marriages included two to three wives in a partnership with a sole male companion. However, the bonnet series presents an extreme, showing the high profile families of esteemed Church Prophets such as Lorenzo Snow and Joseph Smith. Ellsworth presents a narrowed and incomplete narrative of polygamy. However, focusing on prominent and large polygamist families generates a discussion about the women who, even though married to powerful and high-ranking Church officials, remain unnamed and overlooked within the faith. Women remain absent following their fulfillment of Smith's prophecy to accept plural marriage, and their husbands receive acclaim. By presenting the viewer with a controlled lens dedicated to only prominent polygamist families, Ellsworth skillfully foregrounds the omission of historical Mormon women by Church Doctrine and records.

[39] Dunfey, 523-536.

WOMEN ONLY

In the *Seer Bonnet* series, Ellsworth foregrounds the theme of community and communal identity. The artist's studio imitates the spaces where pioneer women gathered to collectively produce goods for the family. Ellsworth's sculptures blend the pliable fabric and metal pins through a gendered, tactile, and labor-intensive process. Notions concerning community take center stage during production—only women are invited inside the artist's personal space. This exclusion of male bodies echoes Ellsworth's interest in solely the wives of polygamy and the bonds between the women. Prior to construction, the group reads biographical information—compiled by Ellsworth and her paid assistants— regarding the woman tied to each bonnet in production. During the entire course of production, the contributors refer to individual bonnets by the name of the wife associated with the particular piece. This evocation with each sculpture generates a presence of the historical women in the studio. Inside the artist's workspace, Ellsworth reinterprets the past and composes her own account of Mormon pioneer women in which men are excluded and women obtain all the prominence and power.

After communicating biographical information and partaking in a present-day recollection of past women, silence engulfs the studio. The artist confesses that she does not work well surrounded by commotion and noise, and therefore demands a quiet studio

space.[40] Assistants and volunteers must possess the ability to sit for hours in silence while immersing oneself in replication and deliberation in the physical activity of piercing felt with thousands of corsage pins.

Ellsworth prioritizes both a personal connection to the pioneer women and a physical interaction with the objects during production in the workspace. The commitment to recovering the narrative of Mormon pioneer women situates Ellsworth's work within a feminist lineage that uses 1970s feminist methods interested in the personal, craft, and collaboration. Ellsworth acknowledges feminist methods inside the production and conceptualization of her artwork and uses the approach in the *Seer Bonnet* series to raise consciousness about historically forgotten women.[41] The female-only workers have a physical connection to the bonnets, ever conscious of the pin's sharpness as it penetrates the soft pliable felt. Occasionally the pin pricks or pokes the maker, possibly drawing blood. This sort of maker/material interactions suggests a palpable relationship to the women signified by each object as the biographies of each women become intertwined to the material that constitute their bonnet. Even beyond the walls of the studio, a tactile relationship with the object continues. The constant shifting of the pins requires adjustment and the reinsertion of the materials by handlers, which initiates a reenactment or, at the very least, a prolonged interaction with the bonnets. However, the silent, contemplative, and informative air of the studio dissipates, and the regular

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[40] Angela Ellsworth, "Studio Visit Part 3," YouTube video, 6:32, posted by "threestarblue," February 22, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ePs-jR9DGk.

[41] Angela Ellsworth, "Research: Angela Ellsworth," http://art.asu.edu/intermedia/research_ellsworth.php (accessed May 25, 2013). In a small biography written by Angela Ellsworth on the ASU Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts website Ellsworth states, "My interdisciplinary art practice is situated within the histories and strategies of feminist art, conceptual art, and performance art."

adjustments and alterations accentuate a material connection detached from the personal story as read inside the studio space.

In order to conjure the names and stories of absent women, Ellsworth reinterprets and appropriates art practices from 1970s feminist artists. The 1970s feminist art movement drew on the civil rights movements and elementary women's movements in the 1960s.[42] Participants pursued ways to better the position of women both inside and outside the art world. Inside the art world, women fought for more representation in galleries as well as museum collections. In an attempt to combat the male-dominated art world and a male aesthetic, a group of female artists proposed the presence of a "female imagery," a distinctive category of feminine sensibility and aesthetic united by a shared gender and social experiences.[43] This discernible "female imagery" manifested as explicit practices concerned with creating more empowered and positive images of women.[44] Work centered on sharing autobiographical and personal information in order to create a connection among women based on joint and universal experiences, including menstruation, childbearing, maternity, aging, eroticism, domesticity, violence, and objectification. The collective mentality of women artists prompted the revival of past

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[42] Laura Meyer, "Power and Pleasure: Feminist Art Practice and Theory in the United States and Britain," in *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*, edited by Amelia Jones (Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006) 317-339.
[43] Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro, "Female Imagery," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Amelia Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 40-43.
[44] In addition to Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro's assessment of a "female sensibility," Lucy Lippard in her book *From the Center: feminist essays on women's art*," asserts that there are fundamental aspects of art by women that are inaccessible to men due to differing political, biological, and social experiences in society.

modes of female craft production, specifically utilizing media associated with women's handiwork and traditionally precluded from mainstream notions of "high art."[45]

In order to raise consciousness about pioneer women, Ellsworth constructs a narrative about the figures with autobiographical information. By using craft techniques such as hand pushing pins, Ellsworth recreates and re-envisions the work of past women. A palpable relationship with the materials aids Ellsworth and the assistants with the process of interweaving the personal story of each wife into their specific bonnet. The revaluation of women's labor practices during construction of the bonnets suggests that even the women left unnamed can obtain a semblance of commemoration through the utilization of techniques generally only performed in the home by women. The desire to recuperate "feminine" production methods and elevate good produced in the home to high art emerged out of a necessity to define traditional "women's work" as legitimate artistic labor.[46]

Ellsworth reworks the typical pioneer community by mimicking home production during the frontier days and drawing acute attention to women's work. As part of the domestic tasks, women spun, wove, stitched, sewed, and mended the majority of household garments.[47] Following the harvesting of wool, pioneer women assembled together, sharing a loom, and spending the day creating the material to make into garments for the family.[48] As one frontier women stated, "we would go early in the

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[45] Meyer, 317-339.
[46] Elissa Auther, *String, Felt, Thread: the Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2010), 1-46.
[47] Jessie L. Embry, "Women's Life Cycles" in *Women in Utah History: Paradigm or Paradox*, edited by Patricia Lyn Scott and Linda Thatcher (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005) 394-411.
[48] Arrington and Madsen, 6-9.

morning and spin all day, stopping only to eat."[49] Similarly, Ellsworth invites only women into her studio, creating a contemporary gendered space that resembles the female dominated spaces of home production and spinning on the loom from Mormon frontier life. Participants gather inside the artist's workspace for a specified undertaking that becomes analogous to past pioneer women assembling in a space to share looms and make home textiles.

However, there are significant contrasts, as well. Ellsworth's making process is void of the looms, spinning wheels, and needlework traditionally accompanying Mormon pioneer textile production. These tools are replaced with felt and corsage pins that bear little relation to the original materials of the bonnets. Gingham and calico give way to industrially produced metal and fabric. The women enter into the shared spaces for different reasons, past pioneer women labored out of necessity for the wellbeing of the household, while Ellsworth gathers women to remember and contest omission.

Regardless of the variations in time, space, or material, a common thread emerges that links both the studio space and the pioneer women's making session, a non-heteronormative atmosphere. Meaning, both spaces are exclusively filled with women and therefore wholly absent of men. Ellsworth refers to the polygamist communities of women as "homosocial," implying that female-specific activities dominated the majority of social engagements for women who entered into polygamist marriages as a result of multiple women sharing one man.[50] A queerness surfaces as a result of the institution of polygamy that encourages interaction between women because the male companions are

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[49] Ibid., 6-9.
[50] Angela Ellsworth, "Hero Worship," Youtube video, 1:59, posted by "BestofPhoenix2010," September 28, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=er6UzXiBiws.

away serving the Church or visiting another wife. Ellsworth chooses to reconstitute this "homosocial" group of women in her own studio, arousing a Mormon and feminist art tradition.

The attention assigned to nonheteronormative relationship in Ellsworth's work implies the presence of an autobiographical undertone in the *Seer Bonnets* series. As an openly gay artist and former member of the LDS church, Ellsworth believes that exploring homosocial relations in plural marriages will help address contemporary issues and fears outside of a "non-heteronormative frame."[51] Yet, at the same time, Ellsworth notes that she does not like to be defined as a "Mormon-ish lesbian artist," even though inspiration for her current work stems from her Mormon heritage and her self-defined position as a queer person and lesbian. By working with the bonnets, Ellsworth grapples with her own prominent Mormon heritage. The artists has stated,

> My work is all about ancestors. I've had issues with this history most of my life. For 15 years, I never talked about how I was raised or where I was raised and moved along with my life, bypassing a huge chunk of my formative years. Looking at this history now, I've started to move beyond the anger against the restricted and oppressive place that I felt within [the Mormon structure], and I feel like I'm looking at this history, particularly polygamy, and how contemporary Mormons want to separate themselves from that history. [52]

Ellsworth channels her feelings about her upbringing into works that address polygamy and envision the self-sufficient communities as completely run and populated by women. Inside the studio, Ellsworth constructs her own female only space derived from past non-heteronormative congregations that stemmed from queerness deeply embedded in the institution of polygamy and the relationships reinforced by the system. However, even

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[51] Kathleen Vanesian, "Angela Ellsworth on Being Gay in the Mormon Church, and her Increasing Success," *Phoenix New Time*, October 7, 2010.
[52] Ibid.

though Ellsworth built a space run and occupied by only women, the "homosocial" space the plural wives occupied was not actually run entirely by them, but was instead embedded into the patriarchal system. While Ellsworth controls every aspect inside the studio, pioneer women labored in a space controlled by men—their husbands and Church officials.

Ellsworth reinterprets and duplicates the gender divisions present in polygamy during the making process by constructing a female-only group who imitate the work performed by polygamist wives and women in pioneer communities. However, the simulation of gender divides in Ellsworth's project is problematized. Ellsworth makes seer-ship objects accessible to the women of the past, yet draws from a patriarchal tradition. Historically, the separation between men and women comes from religious doctrine that gives men the power to receive divine inspiration, and leaves women removed from this realm. Even though Ellsworth chooses to adopt the separation of the two genders from the past in order to elevate the position of women, the historical context for the divide still comes from a system controlled by men. Therefore, even though Ellsworth rewrites the historical narrative in order to turn the focus towards pioneer women and create a unique community of women, the inspiration still stems from a control that the artists seeks to avoid, the Church and the men that organized the Church.

DISPLAY

Removal of the bonnets from the studio space alters the context and perception of the works. The heavily ordered environment of the artist's workshop gives way to uncontrollable variables. Meaning becomes unstable and determined by a number of factors, including the setting and framework provided during exhibition and display, which also fluctuates from institution to institution. These factors prompt questions of recovery and identity, issues contemplated during conception and production of the bonnets. However, even without the comprehensive background provided inside the studio, the sculptural bonnets offer visual cues that incite the viewer to investigate and question the significance of the works.

Extensive contextualization is largely absent from the presentation of the *Seer Bonnets* at the UMFA. However, not all previous exhibitions omitted a larger informational framework for the sculptures. The exhibition of Ellsworth's first bonnets series at the 17th annual Biennale in Sydney in 2010 provided viewers with extended background about the bonnets. For the original nine bonnets modeled after the wives of Ellsworth's great-great grandfather, Lorenzo Snow, the artist constructed oak wood boxes of varying shapes and sizes as display pedestals for the bonnets.[53] These pedestals allude

[53] Oak trees do not grow in Australia; therefore, Ellsworth's wood boxes remained in quarantine for a period of time in order to insure the safety of the product before entering into the Australian environment.

to the wooden handcart pulled by Mormon pioneers during the trek to the Salt Lake Valley, generating another means to revive the past by insinuating a link to historical objects—in this case, through display practices.[54] The use of oak wood boxes reinforces the strong link to a Mormon material culture as well as the historical legacy of the Mormon men and women pushing and pulling handcarts along the pioneer trail. Oak wood boxes again speak to the intention of recovery, re-envisioning past items as a means to awaken and transplant memories and persons into current discourse. In addition to the oak wood boxes, Ellsworth used metal stands varying in height, which allowed for variability in display techniques. The tentacles of some bonnets were suspended freely in space, while others scrapped the bottom of the ground. Still others rested neatly on tall wooden oak boxes.[55] This exhibition technique of varying the display of each bonnet aided in individualizing each work, presenting the objects to the viewer as distinguishable and distinctive works of art based on particular Mormon pioneer women.

The display practices of three *Seer Bonnet* sculptures in the UMFA emphasize the discontinuity between the act of recovering inside the studio—meticulously piercing the felt with pins— and the contextualization of the sculpture inside the museum. The works are shown on metal stands topped by wooden platforms of all the same height, which

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Meredith Hughes, "The Global Dimensions of Cloth: The 17th Annual Biennale," http://www.craftaustralia.org.au/library/review.php?id=global_dimension_of_cloth (accessed February 15, 2013).

[54] Made of wood, handcarts balanced on two wheels and required one to pull or push using two long arms that extend from a truck bed like surface that carried around 400 pounds of supplies.

[55] Meredith Hughes, "The Global Dimensions of Cloth: The 17th Annual Biennale," http://www.craftaustralia.org.au/library/review.php?id=global_dimension_of_cloth (accessed February 15, 2013).

creates a deceptive uniformity among the work.[56] Variations in the bonnets become distinguishable only by paying close attention to subtle changes in pins size, color, and patterning on the exterior surface. The visual cues of presentation do not aid in perceiving slight disparities among the sculptures. Instead, the UMFA patron must approach the bonnets and examine pin size, color, and patterns from one work to the next. Additionally, the viewers receive little additional information beyond artistic design motivation. Texts concerning the identity and biographies of the women do not accompany the exhibition of the objects.[57] This exclusion of supplementary information, coupled with the original perception of uniformity between the works, seems to counteract the undertakings of the making process, possibly drawing attention to Ellsworth's misperception about the salience of her work once it exits the instructive and guiding space of the art studio. However, the names of the wives in the margins and the exclusion of biographical information during exhibition potentially represent a tactical ploy by Ellsworth to expose the degree to which the Mormon Church overlooks past frontier women.

The lustrous eye-catching pearl-tipped corsage pins stand as a replacement for the practical, cheap, and sturdy calico material; transforming the historically protective and safe item into one of danger through a modification of material. The materials used for the construction of the sculptures create an awareness of absence. This vacancy becomes distinctively apparent when one observes the oversized characteristic of the sculptural

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[56] Angela Ellsworth, *Seer Bonnet*, http://umfa.utah.edu/FoCA_acquisitions

[57] This information was obtained during a conversation with the UMFA staff about display techniques of Ellsworth's work at the University of Utah Museum. Additionally, I contacted the Phoenix Art Museum and the modern art curator Sara Cochran informed me that similar to the UMFA, only design inspiration and a brief history of Ellsworth accompanies the display of the bonnets.

bonnet together with the threatening and intrusive positioning of the pins in the interior cavity. Ellsworth's bonnets appear far removed from the practicality and use-value of the past artifacts, yet even as object void of their original utility, the sculptures visually replicate the historic artifact and clothing item, the sunbonnet, and thus encourage the viewer to contemplate the works and the past from which they originate.

Even though the materials imply an absence of a body, a sense of collective identity subsists amongst the works. The *Seer Bonnet* series signifying the thirty-five wives of Joseph Smith exists only as scattered pieces owned by a number of different galleries, museums, and art institutions. The incompleteness of the series and the separation of the three bonnets from previous and future work alters the perception of the works inside the UMFA. However, inside the UMFA, the three sunbonnets situated alongside one another offer the viewer a level of contextualization. *Seer Bonnet X, XI, and XII* are numerically adjacent, suggesting a close relationship between the three works. Additionally, the visual qualities—color palette, designs, and structure—suggest a strong relationship between the objects. Both figural absence and the pearl-tipped pins encourage evaluation, which reveal individuality and distinctiveness from one work to the next.

In contrast to the presentation of Ellsworth's works at the UMFA, the Daughters of Utah Pioneer Museum in Salt Lake City, Utah (DUPM) displays the soft durable cotton gingham material of traditional bonnets. The violence of the pins gives way to a different set of materials, and this differs from one's interaction with the homemade

nineteenth-century calico sunbonnets inside the DUPM.[58] Inside the historical pioneer museum, women's pioneer clothing, artifacts, and memorabilia appear in glass cases low to the ground. Scattered throughout four floors of pioneer history, a large cache of sunbonnets are catalogued together on the second floor. The case is pushed up against the wall. In order to view the artifacts, one must squat or sit on the floor. Some bonnets are mounted on stands, thereby giving shape to the artifacts. However, most of the sunbonnets lay flat on the shelves, overlapping and touching inside the cluttered displays. Placards in the case note the owner and donor of the garment. The display of the sunbonnets in the DUPM allows the viewer to recognize their materiality—their soft, pliable material properties as they overlay one another and lie flat on the shelves. Rather than implying an absence or loss, the disorder of the display shelves and the amount of objects inside the pioneer museum suggests a presence of life and culture from the past. Here, too, the volume of bonnets evokes the female communities of past Mormon households. However, navigating the space inside the museum and locating specific objects becomes at times an impossible task. The bonnets remain hidden inside the museum only viewed by visitors who thoroughly explore each floor case-by-case, item-by-item.

The display practices inside the DUPM uphold Ellsworth's proposal that women fall to the background of Mormon pioneer history. Just as the wives of prominent polygamist prophets go unrecognized for their contributions, the sunbonnets become lost amongst the overwhelming number of artifacts stacked inside the DUPM. Conversely,

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[58] Alex Potts, "Tactility: The Interrogation of Medium in Art of the 1960s," *Art History* 27, no. 2 (April 2004): 283-303.

inside the UMFA, the mounting of the bonnets on pedestals creates a space for the viewer to examine the garment. The open display technique and the attractiveness of the bonnet design encourage viewing and provoke gallery visitors to approach the objects. Therefore, while Ellsworth employs sharp materials undesirable to place against one's skin, the draw of the shiny and lustrous exterior of the materials inspires looking within an open and manageable space. A type of recovery takes place inside the UMFA, even though the three bonnets stand removed from the studio and the other "sister wives" in the series. Full retrieval may only occur in Ellsworth's workspace with the aid of additional information, yet the attractiveness of the bonnets provides the potential to create a different type of remembrance. This type of remembrance is contingent on the ability of the materials to elicit notice and intrigue from visitors to the museum. At the DUPM, many objects and narratives become overwhelmed by the whole, while in the *Seer Bonnet* series, Ellsworth deliberately builds both collective and individual identity in a series that suggests the community of the polygamist women with an emphasis on the unique stories of the few married to prominent Church prophets.

CONCLUSION

Recovery stands central to Angela Ellsworth's intention in producing another *Seer Bonnet* series based on the wives of Joseph Smith. The artist's Mormon lineage and her own involvement in the LDS Church drew Ellsworth towards a project focused on women of polygamy. Ellsworth utilizes objects of Mormon material culture to unearth and redefine an ambiguous history that foregrounds men and hides women. *Seer Bonnets* represents a project by the artist to combine two artifacts—the sunbonnet and the seer stone—into a sculptural work intended to obscure gender boundaries and recognize a community of women that remain forgotten and overlooked.

Ellsworth begins her recovery project by coordinating a deliberate making process. Discussion and meditation in an exclusively female space become part of a recovery process performed inside the workspace.

However, once the bonnets exit the studio and enter into the museum, the works lose a certain degree of contextualization. Ellsworth display techniques—such as the addition of oak wood box—provide the viewer with additional pieces of information. Even outside the artists' workspace, the collective identity of the works remains intact. However, the individual identity of the women signified by each work becomes hard to sustain. The autobiographical stories dissolve leaving only the metal-tipped corsage pins and felt displayed in the gallery. However, the attractiveness of the bonnets encourages viewers to approach and interact with the works. Each bonnet provokes questions about

the function and meaning of an item that counteracts its own original purpose, changing soft durable fabric into hard sold metal.

Ellsworth utilizes a material past, the studio environment, and the framing of the museum in order to construct objects that combat omission and encourage the formation of a community of women. The project investigates the dynamics of Mormon pioneer multiple partner households in an attempt to reenvision polygamist communities. By rewriting the narrative and role of women on the frontier, Ellsworth participates in a historical engagement dedicated to recovering the women of the past. Through the project, Ellsworth scrutinizes the institution of polygamy emphasizing that even the wives prominent Church prophets remain unknown and forgotten. However, Ellsworth duplicates the gender division of frontier life and LDS Church activities. The artist imagines a community of all women, removed from the control and power of men.

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